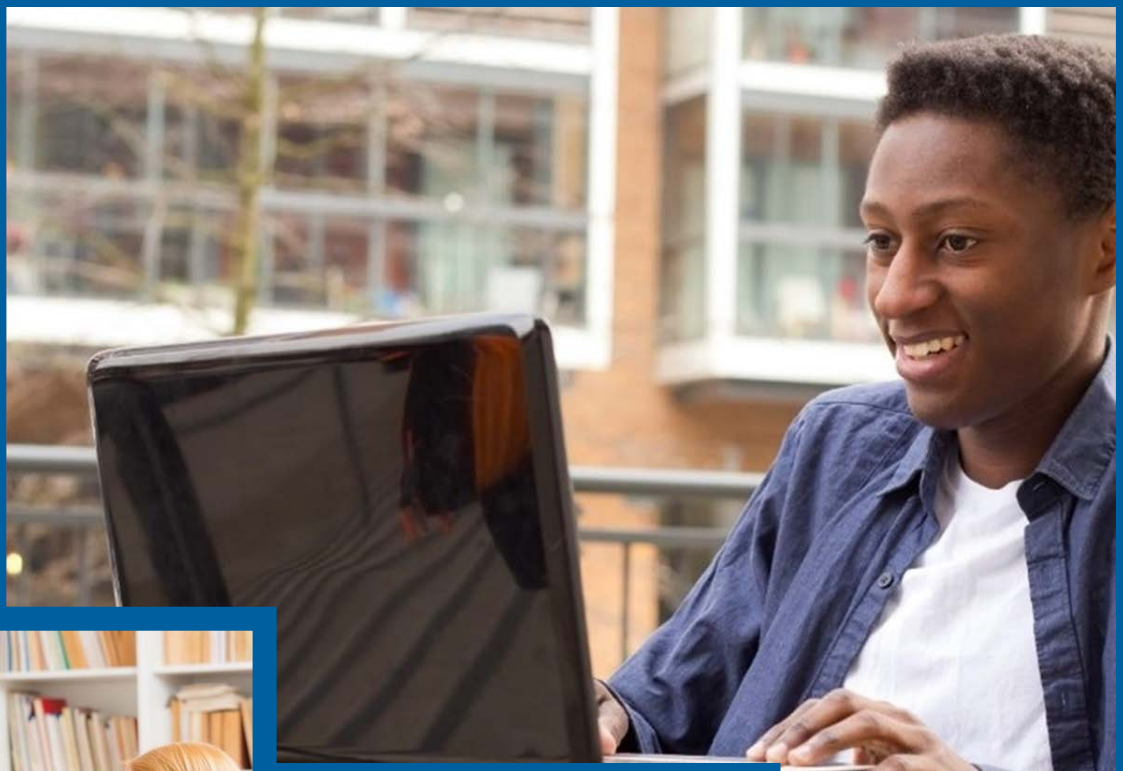

Barriers to training and employment for youth with disabilities

Research synthesis

DECEMBER 2022

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INNOVATION • EXPERIMENTATION • EVALUATION

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For more information on SRDC, contact

Social Research and Demonstration Corporation
55 Murray Street, Suite 400
Ottawa, Ontario K1N 5M3
613-237-4311 | 1-866-896-7732
info@srdc.org | www.srdc.org

Vancouver Office
890 West Pender Street, Suite 440
Vancouver, British Columbia V6C 1J9
604-601-4070

Remote offices:
Alberta, British Columbia, Manitoba, New Brunswick, Newfoundland and Labrador, Nova Scotia, Ontario, Quebec, and Saskatchewan
1-866-896-7732

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Youth with disabilities may face a variety of barriers in the labour market, and there are many employment support programs and services that aim to address these barriers. SRDC has conducted considerable research into the employment and training barriers faced by youth with disabilities and has evaluated innovative solutions. This report synthesizes these research and evaluation findings and identifies gaps for future research.

A total of 41 SRDC project reports were used in a research synthesis that spanned a variety of research themes, with most relating to youth development and inclusion, labour market integration of persons with disabilities, and employment supports and services. Once key findings had been extracted and coded, the key lessons learned were validated in a facilitated discussion with many of the SRDC researchers involved. Researchers were also encouraged to share what remained from their experience as key gaps in knowledge. The obvious caveat is that this review did not extend beyond SRDC reports so barriers, programming, identified gaps and recommendations are necessarily limited to SRDC project experience. We present a summary of the results below, with sources of evidence referenced in the main report.

Overall, youth face complex and diverse barriers to employment, often facing multiple challenges at once. Therefore, the intersecting identities of youth should be considered when providing services, as a diversity of identities can impact employment barriers. This necessitates a holistic system of supports that can support the whole person and that are tailored to an individual's needs.

Stigma and discrimination against youth's various identities are at the root of many employment barriers. Employment barriers can be felt at the social, organizational, and individual levels:

- Social barriers can stem from issues with the labour market (i.e., jobs are not available or are inaccessible), barriers to developing the required skills and experience for employment, as well as employment incompatibility with social assistance.
- Organizational barriers can stem from employers not being equipped, or perceiving themselves not to be equipped, to support youth with disabilities.
- Individual barriers among youth can be a perceived lack of work experience or disjointed work history.

To address the complexity of employment barriers faced by youth with disabilities, a strengths-based systems approach should be adopted as opposed to a deficit-based approach. Such an approach builds up youth's strengths, supports coping and resilience, and allows youth to see

themselves at their best. Additionally, a strengths-based approach implies a demand-led strategy with employers, in which employers are incentivized to engage with employment support programs and play a leadership role in the employment of youth. There are many effective incentives and supports to promote successful employment for people with disabilities, including during the recruiting and hiring phase, the training phase, and for employee retention.

In recognizing the complex and diverse barriers youth with disabilities face, employment support services should be intersectional, trauma-informed, culturally responsive, and identity-affirming. These services should be easily accessible, address essential needs, and extend beyond employment.

Youth with disabilities tend to be the least well-served by typical employment programs. As many employment programs are siloed, they tend to serve individuals based on a single identity characteristic, rather than multiple attributes of each person. These programs' outcomes are often determined by government or funders rather than service users, making it difficult to evaluate their effectiveness from users' perspectives. An in-depth, formal valuation and/or an informal approach can be more effective in assessing youth's soft skills and assets. There is a current need for multiple entry points into employment programs that extend into adulthood and/or combine employment together with specialized and integrated 'wrap-around' services. A specific identified need was training to support development of soft skills. A key concern from several studies was the temporary nature of funding: sustained funding of programs would make services more accessible.

Youth access employment services in many ways. These include through high school (either through career education/career counsellor or teachers), their parents, their peers, post-secondary institutions, and out of school programs for both targeted and non-targeted youth.

Youth identified being able to register for services online through a fast and straightforward process as important. Online advertisements for services should link directly to online registration. When it came to programming, youth with disabilities signalled being receptive to both online and in-person options and given the diversity of accessibility barriers, having both options available is increasingly essential.

Youth placed high priority on services establishing a sense of safety and trust; incorporating different types of learning; cultivating a positive, welcoming organizational culture; and supporting youth financially to participate in the program. Youth with disabilities utilized a variety of different sources of financial support, pointing to a requirement for compatibility between the program and their funding. In addition to paid employment programs, income sources included direct government support (federal and provincial benefits), private/employer support, and others such as help from family and friends.

When it came to barriers accessing services, youth experienced a variety including:

- Geographical barriers, such as inaccessible locations of services or employment opportunities
- Financial barriers, such as inability to meet basic needs while participating in a program
- Social barriers, such as feeling alienated
- Insufficient levels of support available, which could lead to unhelpful or off-putting competition in the application process
- Long wait times for services
- Poor awareness of programs in their area
- Not enough flexibility or follow up
- Communication, leading to an inadequate assessment of needs
- Difficulty navigating services.

Youth generally preferred 'one-stop-shops', i.e., with multiple services in one location, in order to make a broad range of supports more accessible. Furthermore, they saw a need for holistic and integrated services that were culturally appropriate. Information about services should be readily accessible and well-marketed to diverse youth, to encourage uptake.

Youth were attracted to employment support programs and services that they found engaging, that were flexible and tailored to individual career goals, and that maintained a safe and motivational environment making them feel comfortable and confident. Service facilitators should have familiarity with youth experiences, including in the labour market.

Although SRDC has completed and drawn upon a large volume of research into employment barriers for youth with disabilities and evaluation of programming, there are still a number of knowledge gaps that remain for research to fill. This includes better defining the target populations, and what their needs are. More research is needed to focus on what a well-delivered service looks like, and what would be more effective approaches for measuring programs' success and outcomes. There is also a major research gap concerning the roles and preparedness of employers for all aspects of the employment relationship from hiring and training through to retention of youth with disabilities.

BACKGROUND

The Youth Employment and Skills Strategy (YESS) is a horizontal initiative, led by ESDC in collaboration with 11 other federal departments, agencies, and crown corporations, which provides funding to organizations to deliver a range of activities that help youth overcome barriers to employment and develop a broad range of skills and knowledge in order to participate in the current and future labour market. ESDC's YESS program also encourages collaborations and innovation to increase capacity across the youth service provider network (e.g., employers, service delivery organizations, and educational institutions), to better support youth, and to help employers hire and retain youth, in particular, those who face barriers, including youth with disabilities.

YESS aims to connect young people with information, programs, and services that facilitate and support transitions into the labour market. As youth with disabilities continue to face barriers in the labour market, ESDC seeks to improve and update YESS programming to ensure that it better addresses those barriers. Finding solutions requires a better understanding of the needs of youth with disabilities, their labour market experience and their experiences seeking out and using employment programming.

Employment and training programs designed to support people on the path towards employment and career development success are increasingly in demand in the modern economy. Automation, disruptive technologies, and artificial intelligence have already impacted Canada's workplaces and the labour market.

Of course, traditional technical skills remain critical to participation in the labour market, but changes driven by rapid globalization, shifts towards a knowledge economy, and the rise of gig and short-term work mean employers are increasingly placing value on foundational and social-emotional learning (SEL), sometimes termed "soft" skills, such as communication, collaboration, complex problem-solving, adaptability, creativity, leadership, and management (McKinsey Global Institute, 2018; RBC, 2018). Marginalized groups and those underrepresented in Canada's workforce (i.e., "equity seeking groups") such as women, youth, Indigenous persons, newcomers, members of racialized groups, persons with disabilities, and people who identify as 2S/LGBTQ+ are especially vulnerable to the growing emphasis on SEL/soft skills (Cukier, Hodson, & Omar, 2015). Groups like youth with disabilities that face multiple individual, organizational, and systemic barriers often lack the types of experiences and supports that foster SEL/soft skills, such as coaching from mentors and role models and positive early learning experiences.

Those who struggle to gain a foothold in the labour market often turn to employment support and training programs like those funded by YESS. Some have been associated with positive labour market outcomes, but there is evidence that their success is mixed, and certainly may not lead to better outcomes for all (e.g., Mawn et al., 2017; Travinka, Froy, & Pine, 2013).

With its mandate to promote skills development, labour market participation and inclusiveness, and labour market efficiency, ESDC requires up-to-date research and analysis of the skills gaps, learning needs, and barriers faced by equity-seeking groups in order to adapt and target its programs and services. ESDC is currently seeking to better understand the needs and experiences of youth with disabilities as they seek to participate in the labour market and as they attempt to access and participate in employment support programs that are already, or could be, offered by YESS.

While there is considerable existing evidence of the employment and training barriers faced by youth with disabilities, there is a need to synthesize this evidence systematically and identify gaps where evidence is in short supply. SRDC is contributing to this effort with this report, synthesizing what has been learned from recent SRDC research.

As gaps in knowledge are identified from this report and others, ESDC will build out a research agenda to commission further primary and secondary research to fill those gaps. Ultimately, the knowledge will be mobilized to inform the development of program design options, including strategies to build relationships with youth with disabilities and connect them to YESS services and supports that can assist them on their journeys to meaningful employment.

CONSIDERATIONS

SRDC's typical starting point for engaging in such work involves developing a list of key research questions and then implementing as wide ranging a review as possible to learn what is known in answer to each question. The resulting evidence can be used to build a framework for assessing where knowledge gaps lie. Research questions that focus on what is currently known and with what level of certainty (to help identify gaps) are optimally answered through a scoping review – an extensive review of the academic and grey literature relevant to Canada alongside an environmental scan of program approaches, including key informant interviews with experts in the field, with careful synthesis of the gathered knowledge into a conceptual framework that can guide development of ESDC's plan for further research. This work would be undertaken in partnership with youth with disabilities themselves to ensure the investigation is sufficiently comprehensive to cover all the relevant dimensions of barriers to employment and training, consults appropriate sources, and includes all keywords. The products would include the knowledge synthesis and framework to guide decisions on data needs and future analysis.

Such a scoping review is a major undertaking. Given the immediately available budget and timelines, the current project is intended as an initial foundation to support the process of developing a comprehensive research strategy. SRDC is seeking to answer questions about what is currently known to the extent possible from a wide-ranging review of its own relevant, existing research, mostly drawing on work with youth with disabilities. Some additional analyses of work with a broader cross-section of people with disabilities and diverse groups of youth have also been included. Given SRDC's past projects' scope and policy relevance, this smaller-scope project yields a report that – while incomplete – synthesizes a great deal of state-of-the art knowledge concerning skills gaps, learning needs, and systemic barriers to employment faced by youth with disabilities, as far as possible using an intersectional lens.

METHODS

STUDY OBJECTIVES

This research synthesis aims to consolidate findings from recently conducted SRDC studies (within the past ten years) that shed light on the skills gaps, learning needs, and barriers faced by youth with disabilities in the labour market and in attempting to use employment programming.

These studies have included primary data collection and secondary analysis of work SRDC has conducted to date, with the aim of exploring the following research questions agreed with ESDC at the project outset.

Research questions

1. What employment barriers are youth with disabilities currently facing?
2. What employment services do youth with disabilities most need?
3. How well is the current mix of services meeting needs, what gaps remain to be filled?
4. How are they accessing services? How would they prefer to access services?
5. What barriers stand in the way of youth accessing the services they need, including those newly arising in the current context of Covid-19?
6. How do youth with disabilities want to be reached?
7. What services or programs do youth with disabilities want to be connected to?

Terminology

We take the broad definition of barriers and disability from the Accessible Canada Act.[1]

[1] https://www.canada.ca/en/employment-social-development/programs/accessible-people-disabilities/act-summary.html#h2.02

- A **barrier** "means anything — including anything physical, architectural, technological or attitudinal, anything that is based on information or communications or anything that is the result of a policy or a practice — that hinders the full and equal participation in society of persons with an impairment, including a physical, mental, intellectual, cognitive, learning, communication or sensory impairment or a functional limitation."

- A **disability** "means any impairment, including a physical, mental, intellectual, cognitive, learning, communication or sensory impairment — or a functional limitation — whether permanent, temporary or episodic in nature, or evident or not, that, in interaction with a barrier, hinders a person's full and equal participation in society."

While these are broad definitions, it should be noted that many youth with disabilities will possess other attributes or identify with characteristics that may place them at a disadvantage with respect to the labour market and employment programs, such as LGBTQ2S+, racialized or Indigenous identity. Youth will thus face diverse disadvantages attributable to the intersection of different characteristics. A fulsome accounting for all barriers requires an intersectional lens to ensure no barriers that youth with disabilities face are overlooked, even if these are unrelated to their disability.

A related note is that many programs, and research projects, require participants to self-disclose their disability. Many factors, including stigma, may limit the willingness of some youth to seek a diagnosis or assessment and/or to self-disclose. Youth may be unaware of their disability. This limits the scope of who can access programs and what is known about youth with disabilities who do not disclose. Furthermore, the episodic nature of some disabilities means some youth will move in and out of the scope of programming. Self-disclosure and episodic disability are two factors that can limit understanding of the barriers faced and resulting service needs in much of the data collected to date.

LITERATURE REVIEW

To develop the research synthesis, SRDC's research team undertook a literature review of relevant work SRDC has completed to date. A detailed outline of the data collection and analysis is provided below.

Data collection

All projects completed by SRDC are outlined on the SRDC website. The website also hosts most reports that are publicly available.

In addition to relevant projects listed in SRDC's original project proposal to ESDC, the team exhaustively reviewed project listings on SRDC's website to identify potentially relevant projects. Only projects completed within the last ten years were considered in order to keep findings recent. Key terms used to find relevant documents included 'youth', 'employment', and 'disability'. As SRDC's website organizes projects into policy areas, projects were reviewed for these key terms under the following categories:

- Employment programs
- Employment supports and services
- Health – Mental health programs
- Labour market integration of persons with disabilities
- Post-secondary education – Access and persistence
- Workplace diversity and inclusion
- Youth development and inclusion.

A list of 72 potentially relevant projects were compiled. Publicly available reports from these projects were then collected from either SRDC's website or an external partner's website. Non-public reports were accessed within SRDC's archive. Upon review, 41 of these documents contained information relevant to the research synthesis.

Data analysis

Once collected and found to contain relevant information, these 41 reports were imported into NVivo to begin qualitative analysis. Researchers reviewed the reports and coded to identify lessons learned with respect to each of the seven research questions. This yielded a large body of data organized in relation to each research question.

Once this initial round of coding was complete, the coded material was synthesized by SRDC researchers to draw out common themes and key findings. This yielded a high-level summary of key lessons emerging across the different projects.

Once these key findings were compiled, they were then validated through a meeting with seven additional SRDC researchers with experience working on the past and current relevant projects. This step was completed to ensure no sources were missing and that interpretations were appropriate. Two other researchers who could not attend the meeting provided additional

written comments. The resulting lessons learned are included in this report in addition to findings from the document analysis.

The findings from the detailed coded material are discussed below in the context of each research question. An exposition of the resulting research gaps is also provided based on a thorough assessment of what has been learned from the SRDC literature and across the experiences of SRDC's researchers.

FINDINGS

SUMMARY OF DATA COLLECTED

Reports from the past ten years were considered in this analysis, and the oldest report included in the 41 reports reviewed was published in 2013. However, most reports (68%, n=28) included in this analysis were published since 2020. Slightly more than half of the reports (54%, n=22) were publicly available online while the rest were accessed through SRDC's archive.

The full set of reports reviewed for this synthesis addressed a variety of research themes, outlined below:

Table 1 Research themes of relevant reports included in research synthesis[2]

Research theme	Number of documents	Percentage of total (n=41)
Employment – Employment programs	4	9.8%
Employment – Employment supports and services	16	39.0%
Employment – Immigrant labour market integration	4	9.8%
Employment – Labour market integration of persons with disabilities	13	31.7%
Employment – Workplace diversity and inclusion	7	17.1%
Health – Mental health programs	2	4.9%
Income security – 'Making work pay'	1	2.4%
Income security – Social assistance	4	9.8%
Post-secondary education – Graduate labour market	4	9.8%
Post-secondary education – Student financial aid	1	2.4%

[2] Some projects are related to multiple research themes

Research theme	Number of documents	Percentage of total (n=41)
Social finance	1	2.4%
Youth development and inclusion	16	39.0%
Not categorized	7	17.1%

As shown in Table 1, reports included in the research synthesis were related to a variety of research themes. The most prevalent themes were employment supports and services (n=16), youth development and inclusion (n=16), and labour market integration of persons with disabilities (n=13). Refer to Table 2 in Appendix A for a more detailed summary of the most frequently cited reports in this synthesis.

The lessons learned from the analysis of these reports, below, are organized by the seven research questions agreed with ESDC at the outset. The publicly available reports are referenced alongside each finding and appear with URL links in the references section of this report (starting page 40).

1. WHAT EMPLOYMENT BARRIERS ARE YOUTH WITH DISABILITIES CURRENTLY FACING?

Youth with disabilities face complex and diverse barriers

Youth with disabilities face multiple, inter-related, complex barriers that vary with the individual and their specific situation, and such barriers extend beyond employment.

Many youth face multiple challenges/barriers at once

Multiple projects examining barriers to employment for youth found that they faced challenges on several fronts (SRDC, 2021b; BC Centre for Employment Excellence, 2014; SRDC, 2020a). These projects involved youth with mental health barriers to employment, as well as opportunity youth (youth not enrolled in school/vocational training or currently employed), vulnerable youth, and youth who have experienced trauma.

Multifaceted and intersecting experiences, such as poverty, homelessness, mental health problems, or physical disabilities, can contribute to the disconnect youth feel from employment (Bobadilla et al., 2021a). Therefore, employment specific interventions alone are not sufficient,

with support required from additional interventions to address health, educational, and social environments (Bobadilla et al., 2021a).

Case managers who support opportunity youth reported that they are seeing more multi-barriered youth clients, with an increasing number of these clients having mental health concerns (BC Centre for Employment Excellence, 2017b). Opportunity youth experiencing these multiple barriers were found to encounter additional challenges in their skill development, putting them at a greater risk for unemployment (Bobadilla et al., 2021a). There is also a major risk for opportunity youth to become discouraged, disengaged, and/or socially excluded from long term unemployment (SRDC, 2020c).

Though defined differently than youth with disabilities, there is likely considerable overlap with youth who have experienced trauma. Such youth also experience multiple and persistent barriers to employment (SRDC, 2020a). The consequences of experiencing trauma are complex and can cause changes to an individual's cognitive ability, behavioural reactions, and ability to form social connections, all of which can impact employment success (SRDC, 2020a). Furthermore, experiences of prejudice, stigma, and discrimination in the process of interacting with institutions within health care, housing, child welfare, law enforcement, and other systems can cause further trauma to youth (Bobadilla, Pakula, & Smith Fowler, 2021).

The intersecting identities of youth should be considered

Youth represent an exceptionally diverse group, making it important to consider other identities and social locations when identifying age-based barriers (Pakula & Smith Fowler, 2021). Challenges such as coping with a history of government care, a disability, criminal justice involvement, mental health challenges, substance use problems, trauma, poverty, housing instability, discrimination, and poor accessibility/accommodations were all found to bring additional barriers to employment (BC Centre for Employment Excellence, 2014; SRDC, 2021d).

A study examining disabilities in the workplace (not specifically for youth) found that taking an intersectional approach (acknowledging the interactions of different identities including gender, race, class, sexuality, etc.) was key to improving understanding of the experiences of people with disabilities (SRDC, 2022c). Additionally, a study on disabilities in the workplace found that often there is a strong focus on physical disabilities, when in reality a diversity of disabilities must be considered including cognitive and mental health (Paragg, Brooks-Cleator, & Wray, 2022). Those with both cognitive and physical disabilities experienced a higher difficulty in finding work than those with either a cognitive or physical disability (Bernard, de Raaf, & Wray, 2022).

Subgroups of youth, such as young women, Indigenous youth, youth in rural areas, youth from low-income families, and youth with lower-educated parents, may face different employment barriers (SRDC, 2021b; SRDC, 2020c). A project involving barriers to employment for equity

seeking groups (not specifically youth with disabilities) also found that newcomers, members of racialized groups, and people who identify as LGBTQ2S+ also tend to be the least well serviced by typical employment programs (Pakula & Smith Fowler, 2021).

A holistic system of supports addressing these multiple barriers is preferred

Several projects concluded that youth needed a holistic system of supports, suggesting that addressing individual employment barriers in isolation would be unlikely to prove sufficient (Basharat et al., 2021). One study found that youth support programs tended to be siloed, focusing either on all youth or targeting specifically youth with mental health challenges, but seldom both approaches at once (Pakula & Smith Fowler, 2021). Youth living with mental illness were found to require supports that are flexible and responsive to their various needs (SRDC, 2021b). These include programs with flexible scheduling and eligibility requirements (SRDC, 2021d). Flexible options are important as some youth have differing needs, for example, some youth find online services more accessible, and others less so (SRDC, 2021d).

Within the holistic system, more tailoring of services to better meet the needs of individual youth is also preferred. A study involving youth with mental illness found that a lack of specialized services provided by career development practitioners (CDPs) was a barrier to acquiring employment (YMCA of Greater Vancouver, 2014). Funding and programming constraints seemed to impact the ability of CDPs to improve and tailor services to their client's specialized needs (YMCA of Greater Vancouver, 2014). This finding was also supported in another study involving vulnerable youth, which found that tailoring employment positions to their client's circumstances would be most beneficial, and that having a diverse range of potential job options available was helpful to clients (BC Centre for Employment Excellence, 2017b).

Stigma and discrimination are key employment barriers

Discrimination against youth with disabilities exists in all aspects of society (health, education, labour market), and sits at the root of many key barriers to employment. Systemic discrimination can often be embedded in the labour market, with persistent and limiting workplace perceptions regarding disability caused by a lack of understanding and education (SRDC, 2020a; BC Centre for Employment Excellence, 2014; Smith Fowler, Patry, & Wannell, 2014).

Racial stigma and structural discrimination can create further trauma for youth with disabilities who interact with service providers (SRDC, 2020a). Such discrimination and racism can range from "covert and inconspicuous teasing to explicit and unembellished forms of abuse and racism" (SRDC, 2021d, p. 6). Such experiences may prevent racialized youth from seeking

employment services, as well as individuals who are LGBTQ2S+ and/or have a disability (SRDC, 2020a; SRDC; 2021d).

Potential employers can often discriminate against youth. Lack of understanding, education, and supports can combine to create stigma and sustain discrimination, creating barriers for youth with disabilities (YMCA of Greater Vancouver, 2014). A study on vulnerable youth found that youth with a disability had experienced discrimination in not being hired because they could not do something that other potential employees could do (McCreary Centre Society, 2014). Biases against opportunity youth may also impact an employer's assessment of youth's skills (Bobadilla et al., 2021a). A different study involving youth with disabilities found that many youth had to prematurely leave employment due to inaccessible workplaces and discrimination, lack of accommodations, and health issues that prevented their continuation (SRDC, 2021d). Youth with disabilities also faced discrimination in the hiring process (SRDC, 2021d).

People with disabilities may also perceive themselves to be disadvantaged in employment, or that an employer would perceive them to be disadvantaged (Wannell & Grekou, 2014). A study on disability in the workplace (not specifically youth) found that people with disabilities may not apply to positions due to fear of rejection or discrimination (SRDC, 2022b). People with disabilities may have also disengaged from the labour market due to various barriers that have been compounded by the pandemic (Celeste, de Raaf, & Fraser, 2022). People with disabilities are also under extreme pressure to show that they can perform strongly due to the ableist notions they encounter (SRDC, 2022b).

A project involving youth with mental illnesses found that employers felt underprepared (financially, legally, or from a management perspective) in supporting employees living with mental illness (YMCA of Greater Vancouver, 2014).

Conversely, youth with mental illness expressed reluctance to engage in conversations about mental health with employers, with this reluctance reflecting social stigma (YMCA of Greater Vancouver, 2014). Findings included that a supportive and understanding working environment plays a key role in youth with mental illnesses securing and retaining employment (YMCA of Greater Vancouver, 2014).

Social barriers

Social barriers such as poverty and weak or absent public supports are key barriers to employment for youth with disabilities (McCreary Centre Society, 2014; SRDC, 2014; BC Centre for Employment Excellence, 2017b).

Labour market barriers

Youth very often face worse unemployment than adults, regardless of labour market conditions. While there are generally fewer opportunities in the labour market for youth (Pakula & Smith Fowler, 2021), youth with disabilities fare still worse. Furthermore, a changing labour market is expected to negatively affect youth by causing disruptions to education and training as well as reducing their job earnings and employment due to job losses, which increases barriers to finding work, entering the labour market and transitioning to better jobs (SRDC, 2021b). A study on youth employment found that a lack of available jobs was further exacerbated by the pandemic (SRDC, 2021d). Labour market practices have also changed, with less emphasis on hiring for long-term permanent employment and access to career ladders, and more emphasis on hiring to fill an immediate need (Zizys, 2014). Entry-level jobs are less often a first step in a career ladder and more often a dead-end position (Zizys, 2014).

Currently, many employment opportunities tend to be for part time or temporary work, with a decline in the number of low-skilled and general labour positions available (Bobadilla et al., 2021a). This puts those without easy access to professional development programs or opportunities (such as youth) at a greater risk for unemployment (Bobadilla et al., 2021a). Due to age and limited working experience, youth are usually placed in entry-level positions, which are characterized by low pay and limited upward mobility (Pakula & Smith Fowler, 2021). Therefore, adequate skills training is required to provide youth with a skillset applicable to and valued across jobs and sectors (Bobadilla et al., 2021a).

Furthermore, people with disabilities experience higher exposure to precarious and non-unionized work than those without (Celeste, de Raaf, & Fraser, 2022). People with episodic disabilities in particular also may have difficulty managing a steady work schedule or qualifying for income support programs; in other words, caught between being “too disabled” to sustain continuous employment but “not disabled enough” to meet criteria for income supports (Smith Fowler, Patry, & Wannell, 2014).

Barriers to developing skills and experience

Poverty limits youths’ ability to take unpaid internships, deters them from furthering their education or starting their own business, and can require them to take jobs with limited growth potential or that don’t interfere with other financial supports they’re receiving (Bobadilla, Pakula, & Smith Fowler, 2021; Basharat et al., 2021; YMCA of Greater Vancouver, 2014; SRDC, 2021d). Poverty can also have multiple and layered negative effects on the employment of racialized youth (SRDC, 2020a).

Among vulnerable youth, poverty was found to be a major barrier impeding youth from participating in unpaid work placements or affording the required equipment for paid

employment (such as uniforms or tools) (BC Centre for Employment Excellence, 2014). Additionally, another project involving opportunity youth found unstable housing situations to be a top influence on their employment (Bobadilla, Pakula, & Smith Fowler, 2021; Basharat et al., 2021). Access to childcare has also been identified as a barrier to taking up employment and training opportunities, as has food instability (SRDC, 2019b; SRDC, 2021d). Lack of support with money management, credit information, and tenancy/housing impacts youths' capacities to seek employment (SRDC, 2021d).

Lack of opportunities and incompatibility with social assistance

Youth living in high cost of living areas, such as Vancouver, were less likely to be interested in minimum-wage opportunities, and to need an additional source of support such as living at home or a wage subsidy in order to accept lower wages (BC Centre for Employment Excellence, 2017b). Additionally, in some areas, limited local job opportunities were a commonly reported barrier for youth (Celeste, de Raaf, & Poitevin-DesRivières, 2022). Youth receiving government subsidies may also be hesitant to join a funded employment program if this source of income interferes with their eligibility for assistance (SRDC, 2021d). A study involving people with disabilities (not specifically youth) further supported the need for better program compatibility with other social supports, as provincial and federal social assistance can affect eligibility for services, and vice versa (Pakula & Smith Fowler, 2021).

A project involving opportunity youth found the structural and social barriers to employment that such youth faced to include poverty and difficulty in accessing financial assistance (Bobadilla et al., 2021a). Additionally, a study involving youth with mental illness found that many expressed a strong desire to complete educational credentials but were unsure how to do so while acquiring sufficient income to meet their needs (YMCA of Greater Vancouver, 2014).

Organizational barriers

Organizations are often not equipped to support youth with disabilities (Zizys, 2014). There is often a lack of knowledge and flexibility from employers that deter youth with disabilities from applying for and retaining meaningful employment (McCreary Centre Society, 2014; SRDC, 2021d; Pakula & Smith Fowler, 2021). Many youth with disabilities are not comfortable disclosing their disability based on previous negative experiences of discrimination (YMCA of Greater Vancouver, 2014).

A study involving vulnerable youth found that health conditions or disabilities could hinder a youth's ability to find a job, causing at least one participant to hide her disability from a potential employer (McCreary Centre Society, 2014). Other youth in the study stated that while they were

supported in getting work experience through an employment program, the employer did not hire them when the support program ended (McCreary Centre Society, 2014).

Another study involving youth with mental illness captured employer concerns with hiring youth living with a mental illness, including workplace management, cost, efficiency, reliability, and performance (YMCA of Greater Vancouver, 2014). Employers cited job interviews as an important screening tool yet highlighted the challenges of adequately evaluating an applicant's potential through interviews (YMCA of Greater Vancouver, 2014). Youth concerns included strong anxiety around the interview, job search and/or work integration process (YMCA of Greater Vancouver, 2014).

Youth also have concerns about how disclosure of their disabilities might be received or viewed by a prospective employer (YMCA of Greater Vancouver, 2014). The study outlined many concerns relating to the disclosure of disabilities in the workplace, including the willingness and ability of employers to accommodate, the resulting challenges in workplace management, and the perceived possible costs to employers of accommodating employees living with disabilities (YMCA of Greater Vancouver, 2014). A different study found that among youth with a self-disclosed disability, 29 per cent felt they would need aids or accommodations to help them find or keep a job (BC Centre for Employment Excellence, 2017b).

Both employment service providers and employers vary a great deal in their knowledge of disabilities (YMCA of Greater Vancouver, 2014). A study involving youth with mental illness found many employers expressed concern about supporting employees with mental illness (YMCA of Greater Vancouver, 2014). In the case of employment service providers, the issue was less lack of knowledge, but rather variation in service quality and accessibility to support youth with disabilities adequately (YMCA of Greater Vancouver, 2014).

A study of youth experiences in the workplace found that their work experiences often were physically and socially demanding due to long hours, being on their feet, dealing with the public, and also encountering workplace discrimination and racism (SRDC, 2021d). A study involving people with disabilities (not necessarily youth) determined that a key barrier for those with episodic disabilities was a lack of flexibility (Pakula & Smith Fowler, 2021).

There is a perception among some employers that people with disabilities may not apply to work for them because the work roles they offer might not be realistic for people with disabilities (Paragg, Brooks-Cleator, & Wray, 2022). They perceived that there were not a lot of positions that could be easily and realistically adapted for people with physical disabilities in particular (Paragg, Brooks-Cleator, & Wray, 2022). This perception will need to be tackled for more opportunities to become available.

Individual barriers

Perceived lack of work experience presents a key employment barrier for youth with disabilities (YMCA of Greater Vancouver, 2014; BC Centre for Employment Excellence, 2017b; Celeste, de Raaf, & Poitevin-DesRivières, 2022; Zizys, 2014; SRDC, 2021d). A study involving opportunity youth found that improving youth's soft skills was important for social, cognitive, and psychological development (Bobadilla et al., 2021a). Lack of experience relative to older workers could also be a barrier for youth with disabilities, with some youth describing the challenges of competing for positions against more experienced adults (YMCA of Greater Vancouver, 2014; YMCA, 2014; Pakula & Smith Fowler, 2021).

Some youth also acknowledged areas in which they felt limited, such as not having an up-to-date resume, not having employer references, not doing well in job interviews, and not knowing how and where to look for work (BC Centre for Employment Excellence, 2017b). A concern preventing access to desired jobs was not having enough education or experience (Celeste, de Raaf, & Poitevin-DesRivières, 2022; Zizys, 2014), as well as a lack of connections to local employers and a lack of networking opportunities (SRDC, 2021d). A study involving youth with mental illness found participants concerned that their lack of experience or disjointed work history could act as potential employment barriers (YMCA of Greater Vancouver, 2014). In contrast, employers reported being less concerned with youth's record of experience and more concerned with youth's lack of familiarity with workplace practices and expectations (YMCA of Greater Vancouver, 2014).

Unrealistic, unimaginative, or inflexible expectations around transportation could also be an issue, with some youth describing the challenges of relying on public transit or lack of a driver's licence (BC Centre for Employment Excellence, 2014).

2. WHAT EMPLOYMENT SERVICES DO YOUTH WITH DISABILITIES MOST NEED?

A strengths-based, systems approach

In general, findings support a recommendation that future services and research should adopt a strengths-based, systems approach, rather than a deficit-based approach (Pakula & Smith Fowler, 2021; Paragg, Brooks-Cleator, & Wray, 2022). In other words, the assumption that youth with disabilities accessing more or better services leads to positive outcomes is questionable, and the onus on who is responsible to advocate for inclusion should shift away from youth with disabilities (SRDC, 2019b; BC Centre for Employment Excellence, 2014; Pakula & Smith Fowler, 2021). Employment support programs and services should encourage

employers and society more generally to remove the stigma youth face (Bobadilla, Pakula, & Smith Fowler, 2021; SRDC, 2021c; SRDC, 2017a; BC Centre for Employment Excellence, 2017b).

Characteristics of a strengths-based approach

A study involving youth who have experienced trauma recommends providing a strengths-based and capacity-building approach to support client coping and resilience (Bobadilla, Pakula, & Smith Fowler, 2021; SRDC, 2021c; Pakula & Smith Fowler, 2021). Another study focusing on opportunity youth also supports this approach, suggesting that strength-based approaches provide the conditions for a person to see themselves at their best (Bobadilla et al., 2021a). Such strength-based approaches are characterized by valuing the capacity, skills, knowledge, connections, and potential in individuals and communities (Bobadilla et al., 2021a). This has been operationalized by starting with a skills assessment process in order to identity an individual's knowledge, capabilities, and skills, and then allowing ample opportunities for youth to lead or be engaged in discussions about their goals and priorities (Bobadilla et al., 2021a).

Characterizing individuals, particularly youth, by their problems, risk-factors, or symptoms is counter-productive to helping build resilience (Bobadilla, Pakula, & Smith Fowler, 2021). Doing so can negatively affect their feelings of hopefulness and self-confidence (Bobadilla, Pakula, & Smith Fowler, 2021). Furthermore, by recognizing that trauma is often associated with low self-esteem, nurturing and forward-looking environments can be fostered focusing on positive growth and change (Bobadilla, Pakula, & Smith Fowler, 2021). The study recommended promoting services that recognized, appreciated and built on clients' strengths, reminding youth of their existing assets to frame their resilience and thus change how they see themselves (Bobadilla, Pakula, & Smith Fowler, 2021). Ideally, such an approach would be used in integrated services, to minimize fragmentation across sectors (Bobadilla, Pakula, & Smith Fowler, 2021).

A demand-led strategy

A demand-led strategy to improve youth employment was also supported by multiple reports (Zizys, 2014; BC Centre for Employment Excellence, 2014). Such a strategy involves promoting new skills for new jobs targeting specifically toward youth (BC Centre for Employment Excellence, 2014), as well as reducing the cost to employers of employing low-skilled youth (Zizys, 2014). Ensuring the same employment protections apply to temporary jobs as permanent ones would also be beneficial for youth (Zizys, 2014).

A large part of a demand-led approach involves working with employers to ensure individuals can find the right match to available jobs, which requires ensuring there is a high demand for skills and a high utilization of those skills (BC Centre for Employment Excellence, 2014). Employers could also be incentivized to play a larger leadership role among their peers in the

employment of youth (BC Centre for Employment Excellence, 2014). Such a strategy is supported by an integrated services approach in which youth with specific needs can always expect to be directed to relevant resources and support services (BC Centre for Employment Excellence, 2014).

Employment Social Enterprises (ESEs) have also been the subject of several research studies to determine their effectiveness in removing barriers to employment for youth. ESEs are "a type of social enterprise which offers market-valued products or services and employs individuals facing barriers to employment through either ongoing employment or temporary employment that helps them transition to other work" (BC Centre for Employment Excellence, 2017b, p. 2). A project examining Youth ESEs found that they have a unique role in the labour market representing ideal partners in engaging youth who are facing employment barriers (BC Centre for Employment Excellence, 2017a & 2017b).

Supporting the employment of people with disabilities

A study involving people with disabilities (not specifically youth) found many incentives and supports effective for employers, as well as best practices to support the successful employment of people with disabilities. For recruiting and hiring phases, these can include:

- Financial supports or funding
- Having an inclusivity policy in place before hiring
- Establishing methods to communicate information about disabilities between employer and employee
- Accessible and direct advertising of available positions
- Recognizing hiring a person with a disability is mutually beneficial
- Recognizing that the majority of accommodations for people with disabilities cost little (Paragg, Brooks-Cleator, & Wray, 2022).

For the training phase, these can include:

- Establishing mentoring programs within the organization
- Having clear communication of an employee's role and responsibilities
- Employers providing necessary accommodations for employee (Paragg, Brooks-Cleator, & Wray, 2022).

For employee retention, these can include:

- Having flexible working hours
- Validating employees so they do not feel they need to prove their worth
- Making support easily accessible
- Ensuring employees feel successful
- Offer paid time off and wellness programs
- Ensure people with disabilities are included in emergency response plans (Paragg, Brooks-Cleator, & Wray, 2022).

Services should be intersectional, trauma-informed, culturally responsive, and identity-affirming

Intersectional, trauma-informed, culturally responsive, and identity-affirming approaches focus on building relationships and facilitating safe environments that serve the whole person, thus recognizing that 'youth with disabilities' are a diverse and heterogeneous group (Bobadilla, Pakula, & Smith Fowler, 2021; SRDC, 2021c; Bobadilla et al., 2021a; Basharat et al., 2021; BC Centre for Employment Excellence, 2014; Wannell & Grekou, 2014).

Many reports note that services should be more holistic and/or integrated, supporting the whole person (Bobadilla, Pakula, & Smith Fowler, 2021; SRDC, 2021c; Celeste, de Raaf, & Fraser, 2022). This can be accomplished by recognizing the ways in which trauma, violence, discrimination and stigma can influence health, social outcomes, and behaviours (Bobadilla, Pakula, & Smith Fowler, 2021; SRDC, 2021c). Services should also focus on building strong relationships and creating environments that are physically, emotionally, and socially safe (Bobadilla, Pakula, & Smith Fowler, 2021; SRDC, 2021c; Basharat et al., 2021; Bobadilla et al., 2021a). This can be operationalized by building rapport and trust with youth during the early phases of assessment and intake, which builds the foundation for services by determining youth's needs (Bobadilla, Pakula, & Smith Fowler, 2021; SRDC, 2021c). Having more intimate in-person workshops reportedly helped service providers better identify and address when youth were facing issues, while other youth preferred interacting with services at their own pace, online (Bobadilla et al., 2021a). Engaging youth in goal setting, conflict resolution, with open communication is also important, as is fostering a sense of community and network of support (Bobadilla, Pakula, & Smith Fowler, 2021; SRDC, 2021c; Bobadilla et al., 2021a; Ford, Odegbile, & Forgie, 2022; SRDC, 2019b).

Another recommendation supported in several reports was to broaden evaluation criteria beyond simple metrics (e.g., employed or not) to account for the many forms success can take, especially metrics that are relevant to the individual (McCreary Centre Society, 2014; Bobadilla et al., 2021a; Basharat et al., 2021; SRDC, 2019b; SRDC, 2019a). For example, progress can be tracked through assessment of positive outcomes that align with an individual's goal setting (Bobadilla et al., 2021a; SRDC, 2021c). Reports suggested celebrations covering all forms of success and validating youth's skills and qualifications would be more effective for improving youth's confidence (Bobadilla et al., 2021a; Pakula & Smith Fowler, 2021). Checking in with youth (including after program completion) was also important to maintain connections and support individuals through changing life circumstances (Bobadilla et al., 2021a). These conclusions underscore the need for holistic, learner-centred, and culturally-respectful 'wrap-around' employment services, which combine employment training with other supports such as housing, education, or health support (Bobadilla, Pakula, & Smith Fowler, 2021; SRDC, 2021c; Bobadilla et al., 2021a; Pakula & Smith Fowler, 2021; SRDC, 2022b).

Services should be easily accessible, extend beyond employment, and address essential needs

Services should include wrap-around, centralized, and integrated support for youth, with multiple entry points and continuing into adulthood (Bobadilla, Pakula, & Smith Fowler, 2021; SRDC, 2021c; Ford, Odegbile, & Forgie, 2022; BC Centre for Employment Excellence, 2014; BC Centre for Employment Excellence, 2017a; BC Centre for Employment Excellence, 2017b; SRDC, 2021d; Pakula & Smith Fowler, 2021; SRDC, 2019a). Time and space should be made for youth to identify barriers and express their needs and priorities, with emphasis placed on being able to come back to a safe space despite any challenges they may face (Bobadilla, Pakula, & Smith Fowler, 2021). One key to program success was allowing youth to try opportunities out in a safe space without fear of removal (Pakula & Smith Fowler, 2021). Employment service providers should also recognize that progress can be non-linear and that youth may take longer at different parts of the process (Bobadilla et al., 2021a; SRDC, 2021d). Therefore, services should leave the door open for continued support, since maintaining connection with services is important for youth particularly during transitional periods of their lives (Bobadilla et al., 2021a; SRDC, 2019a).

Navigating the service provider system and network can often be a challenge for youth, as can lengthy waiting lists for obtaining services (YMCA of Greater Vancouver, 2014; Smith Fowler, Patry, & Wannell, 2014), highlighting the need for support in this area and clear procedures for program referrals to and from service providers (Pakula & Smith Fowler, 2021; SRDC, 2019a). Programs' awareness of local resources and strong relationships with community service providers would thus be critical (Bobadilla et al., 2021a; Basharat et al., 2021; Hole et al., 2015; Pakula & Smith Fowler, 2021; BC Centre for Employment Excellence, 2017a, 2019b). Conversely,

fragmentation of such support services into 'silos' would pose additional barriers to accessibility for youth.

Building collaborative relationships with community, industry, and/or employer partners is essential for developing responsive and adaptive skills and employment training services (Bobadilla, Pakula, & Smith Fowler, 2021; Bobadilla et al., 2021a). Supporting work experiences with wage subsidies and work placements could prove important for both employer buy-in and youth motivation (Bobadilla et al., 2021a; BC Centre for Employment Excellence, 2014). Once built, collaborative partnerships help to connect youth to the services and supports they need, providing holistic support to youth in accessing not only employment, but also health care, housing, counselling, government services, childcare, and education (Bobadilla, Pakula, & Smith Fowler, 2021; Bobadilla et al., 2021a).

3. HOW WELL IS THE CURRENT MIX OF SERVICES MEETING NEEDS? WHAT GAPS REMAIN TO BE FILLED?

Youth with disabilities tend to be among the least well-served by typical employment programs

Overall, groups underrepresented in Canada's labour market, including youth with disabilities, tend to be the least well-served by typical training and employment programs (YMCA of Greater Vancouver, 2014; BC Centre for Employment Excellence, 2017a; BC Centre for Employment Excellence, 2017b; Pakula & Smith Fowler, 2021; Lalonde, 2020).

A study involving youth who had experienced trauma found that these youth fared considerably worse in the labour market and had lower earnings than a comparison group (SRDC, 2020a). Similar outcomes were found among youth with lower levels of education and youth with a disability (SRDC, 2021d). As many employment programs are siloed, they tend to serve individuals based on one identity characteristic, rather than multiple (Pakula & Smith Fowler, 2021). This can be an issue as there are many intersecting characteristics among youth that are underrepresented in Canada's labour market, including women, Indigenous persons, newcomers, racialized groups, people who identify as LGBTQ2S+, and persons with disabilities (Pakula & Smith Fowler, 2021). This further points to the need for programs to serve the whole person and consider a client's multiple identities (Pakula & Smith Fowler, 2021) rather than a 'one-size-fits-all' approach to employment services. The latter does not take into account the diversity of life experiences, circumstances, strengths, and needs of individuals with different types of disabilities and identities (Smith Fowler, Patry, & Wannell, 2014; Lalonde, 2020).

Work placement programs tend to be effective at providing youth with disabilities with relevant work experience, but the extent to which they serve long-term and broader needs is unknown (SRDC, 2020a; Bobadilla et al., 2021a; Basharat et al., 2021; Celeste, de Raaf, & Poitevin-DesRivières, 2022; SRDC, 2022a). Experiences such as paid work placements, volunteering, or job shadowing are helpful for youth, but they depend on existing relationships between employment service providers and employers (McCreary Centre Society, 2014). Long-term work placements in particular have been highlighted as an effective approach to address barriers to entering the labour market and act as a stepping stone for career development (BC Centre for Employment Excellence, 2017a & 2017b). In-demand skills as well as certifications (e.g., food handling) were also helpful to youth pursuing job opportunities (Celeste, de Raaf, & Poitevin-DesRivières, 2022).

Program effectiveness is difficult to assess

There are a number of promising programs, but because outcomes are typically based on criteria determined by government/funders rather than service users, researchers and evaluators have found it hard to determine how well the current mix is meeting the needs of youth with disabilities (Bobadilla et al., 2021a; Bobadilla, et al., 2021b; Basharat et al., 2021; Rodier et al., 2020).

Typical limited outcome measures (e.g., employed or not employed) do not tell the whole story and are not necessarily meaningful (Mentor Canada & SRDC, 2021b; Pakula & Smith Fowler, 2021; Celeste, de Raaf, & Fraser, 2022). Problematically, focusing on a narrow range of employment outcomes incentivizes only those outcomes which can promote rapid employment in low-wage, low-status positions, i.e. a 'job first' outcome rather than a person-centric one (McCreary Centre Society, 2014; SRDC, 2021d; Smith Fowler, Patry, & Wannell, 2014). Shifting the focus to strengths-based goals and outcomes guided by the individuals being served will make it easier to assess (and perhaps also increase the likelihood of achieving) success meaningful to the participants (SRDC, 2021d; SRDC, 2022a; Smith Fowler, Patry & Wannell, 2014; SRDC, 2021d; Celeste, de Raaf, & Fraser, 2022).

For example, an in-depth, formal valuation and/or an informal approach can be more effective in assessing youth's soft skills and assets (McCreary Centre Society, 2014). These strengths-based assessments are more helpful to youth in addressing the employment barriers they may experience (McCreary Centre Society, 2014; SRDC, 2021d).

Although holistic programs are found to be effective (McCreary Centre Society, 2014), a clearly articulated employment focus should guide the included employment services (YMCA of Greater Vancouver, 2014). This can include a strong focus on skills that are in demand in the labour

market or from employers, as well as an emphasis on job searching, interviewing, and job readiness (YMCA of Greater Vancouver, 2014).

Remaining gaps

Based on the current review, it is not possible to quantify how many youth with disabilities have unmet needs due to the structural barriers noted in the first research question (i.e., stigma and discrimination). However, unless those barriers are addressed, there will always be youth with unmet needs. Specific current gaps that remain to be filled include specialized and integrated 'wrap-around' services, sustainable funding, and SEL/soft skills development.

The need for specialized, integrated, wrap-around services

Multiple studies have identified a need for specialized, integrated, wrap-around services with multiple easy entry points extending into adulthood and/or employment (Bobadilla et al., 2021a; Bobadilla, et al., 2021b; Basharat et al., 2021; YMCA of Greater Vancouver, 2014; SRDC, 2019b; SRDC; 2021d). Integrated programs targeted to a specific group of youth, tailored to meet their needs have typically been found most effective (Bobadilla et al., 2021a; Pakula & Smith Fowler, 2021). Youth who are most disconnected from supports may benefit from such integrated approaches offering multiple services including those related to education, skills training, housing support, healthcare, and counselling (Bobadilla et al., 2021a; YMCA of Greater Vancouver, 2014; Pakula & Smith Fowler, 2021). Youth also call for employment services that go beyond basic job market skills (i.e.., creating resumes and cover letters), to address skills such as networking, avoiding job scams, finding credible and trustworthy employers, conflict management and labour rights (SRDC, 2021d).

It is also important for services tailored to youth to be flexible, easily accessible, timely, and affordable (YMCA of Greater Vancouver, 2014; Pakula & Smith Fowler, 2021). Having eligibility criteria that are too stringent or lengthy application processes can present barriers for program uptake (SRDC, 2019b). Pre-employment needs should be considered, which can include career development counselling and job coaching (Celeste, de Raaf, & Fraser, 2022). Youth transitioning out of care should also be supported (YMCA of Greater Vancouver, 2014), with support going beyond finding and securing a job and into the initial employment period (e.g., to support requests for accommodations, understanding of labour rights, and dealing with conflict and discrimination) (SRDC, 2021d; Celeste, de Raaf, & Fraser, 2022).

'One-stop-shop' service hubs are one way to support youth accessing a variety of services at once (YMCA of Greater Vancouver, 2014). Another is to facilitate good working relationships across various service providers. However, currently, there are limited mechanisms to facilitate collaboration and share learning across different funders and portfolios (SRDC, 2021b). In other

words, support service systems should work to support the whole person, rather than offering a limited menu of templated services that adopt 'cookie cutter' approaches (SRDC, 2021d).

Sustainable funding

Sustainable funding is a requirement for both programs and individuals, as many youth have identified affordability as a major barrier to accessing counselling services and other supports (YMCA of Greater Vancouver, 2014). Services are often too expensive to be accessible and frequently have lengthy waitlists (SRDC, 2018; McCreary Centre Society, 2014). In some cases, employment programs may be forced to compete against each other for government funding for different services (SRDC, 2021b). Difficulty navigating the resulting complicated service provider system and lengthy waitlists for obtaining services were also identified as barriers to program engagement and participation (YMCA of Greater Vancouver, 2014).

Funding may also be a barrier for more holistic and integrated services, as streaming individuals into a program based on one characteristic (as opposed to the multiple identities they may have) can be driven by limited program funding (Pakula & Smith Fowler, 2021). Providing sufficient ongoing funding for programs is thus important to make them more accessible to youth with disabilities.

Soft skills development

Despite the need for SEL/soft skill training, there is a lack of services and of evidence of their effectiveness (Bobadilla et al., 2021a; Bobadilla, et al., 2021b; Basharat et al., 2021). Developing soft skills is an important part of youth development (Bobadilla et al., 2021a). There is evidence, however, that soft skills training may need to be embedded within employment-specific training programs (Bobadilla et al., 2021a). An in-depth, formal valuation and/or an informal approach can be effective in assessing youth's soft skills and assets (Bobadilla et al., 2021a). Employment service programs can embed soft skills training through a combination of classroom-based instruction, group learning, and paid work experience (Bobadilla et al., 2021a). Opportunities for social activities are also key for youth to develop their SEL/soft skills by building relationships between peers and developing a sense of community (Bobadilla et al., 2021a).

4. HOW ARE THEY ACCESSING SERVICES? HOW WOULD THEY PREFER TO ACCESS SERVICES?

Youth access services in many different ways

Youth access services through high school, post-secondary institutions, and out of school programs (both targeted and non-targeted). Career education is particularly accessed through high school (Smith Fowler, Mák, & SMHO, 2020) but there has been limited study into its effectiveness (SRDC, 2020b; SRDC, 2020c). In addition to career counsellors, youth in high school also access career education through their parents, teachers, peers, or other advisors (SRDC, 2020b; SRDC, 2020c).

Other high school employment services include technical/vocational training, pre apprenticeship programs, cooperative education, dual credit programs, and specialist diplomas (SRDC, 2020b; SRDC, 2020c). Services can also be accessed through post-secondary institutions, including training on using assistive technology for youth with disabilities (SRDC, 2018).

Out of school programs are often available to targeted youth as well as all youth (SRDC, 2020b; SRDC, 2020c). Out of school programs targeted to sub-populations of youth include Indigenous Friendship Centres, immigrant services societies, and disability services societies (SRDC, 2020b; SRDC, 2020c).

Make services accessible both online and in person

Being able to register for services online anytime through a fast and straightforward process is important to youth (SRDC, 2021d; Hole et al., 2015). When advertising services online, it is important that the advertisement link directly to online registration to reduce the risk of youth exiting the process (SRDC, 2021d). Youth are receptive to both online and in-person programming options, and it seems having both options available is essential to accommodate different needs (SRDC, 2021d). For example, an online option is important as many youth feel it is more flexible. Many people with disabilities have access to personal devices (even more so among youth and younger people) allowing access to services online (Hole et al., 2015). But youth also prefer an option to join without using a camera (SRDC, 2021d). Having in-person programming as well is still very important for those youth who are receptive to online options, since building relationships and skills through in-person activities is key for many (SRDC, 2021d; Bobadilla et al., 2021a).

Youth identified many ways that services could be made more accessible

Establish a sense of safety and trust

Establishing a better sense of safety and trust is a key best practice for youth services (SRDC, 2020a; Bobadilla, Pakula, & Smith Fowler, 2021). This can be operationalized in a variety of ways, including:

- Using intake procedures and language that are welcoming
- Creating less threatening physical spaces
- Providing clear information about the programming to ensure informed consent
- Creating crisis plans
- Having predictable expectations
- Scheduling appointments consistently
- Using/displaying diverse languages (SRDC, 2020a).

Incorporate different types of learning

Opportunities for different types of learning should be included to support a diversity of youth with different learning styles. Different types of learning can include: applied (e.g., using measurements in the kitchen); hands-on (e.g., woodworking); or culturally relevant learning (e.g., sharing circles) (Bobadilla, Pakula, & Smith Fowler, 2021). Incorporating non-linear models of learning may also create more opportunities for practice and creativity, allowing youth to learn more about their skills (Bobadilla, Pakula, & Smith Fowler, 2021).

Cultivate a good organizational culture

To increase the accessibility of services, a "good" organizational culture (i.e., one that is flexible and understanding of youth needs) is important. This can include making sure staff understand what youth are going through and what they need (Bobadilla, Pakula, & Smith Fowler, 2021). It can be operationalized through facilitating organizational learning about trauma and violence, equipping staff with tools to support their work with youth (including facilitating relationships with community partners), creating safe spaces, and conducting regular check-ins with youth clients (Bobadilla, Pakula, & Smith Fowler, 2021).

A key part of a positive organizational culture is fostering collaboration and relationships among youth, peers, staff, community partners, and employers (Bobadilla, Pakula, & Smith Fowler, 2021). In addition to contributing to a more integrated service system, such opportunities for safe connections can help equalize power imbalances in relationships for youth (Bobadilla, Pakula, & Smith Fowler, 2021). Learning in a social environment with opportunity to practice building relationships with peers and develop a sense of community is especially important for youth (Bobadilla et al., 2021a).

Having multiple entry and exit points in a program is also key. This flexibility is important so youth feel they can move in and out of programs and return to training without fear of reprisal or exclusions (Bobadilla, Pakula, & Smith Fowler, 2021).

Support youth financially throughout the program

Many employment program participants require financial assistance in order to meet their basic needs, as participating in programs can often require switching away from paid work activities (SRDC, 2021d). Further financial barriers can exist for youth including a lack of transportation, health coverage, training supports, and childcare (SRDC, 2021d). Such barriers can be tackled by financially supporting youth. Mechanisms include paid training, transportation support, childcare, pet care and so on (SRDC, 2021d). Transportation support can include bus tickets, ride sharing, or paid parking (SRDC, 2021d).

Youth use different sources of income support, requiring program compatibility

As youth make use of many different sources of income support, they are concerned to manage transitions into and out of employment programming so that they do not lose income (Celeste, de Raaf, & Fraser, 2022). Therefore, employment programming has to be designed as compatible with other sources of income support. Different sources of income support utilized by youth and people with disabilities are described below.

Employment programs

There have been multiple studies on regional employment programs (SRDC, 2021b; McCreary Centre Society, 2014; Bobadilla et al., 2021a). Some employment services offer opportunities for paid work experience as part of the program, payments which can be used by youth as a form of income support while they attend (Bobadilla et al., 2021a).

Government support

Government assistance is a significant source of income for many youth and people with disabilities (McCreary Centre Society, 2014; SRDC, 2022c; Smith Fowler, Patry, & Wannell, 2014). Types of government assistance can include disability assistance, income assistance and employment insurance (SRDC, 2022a). Examples of federal funding span individual and organizational supports and include Accessible Canada Funding, the Enabling Accessibility Fund, the Opportunity Fund for Persons with Disabilities, the Social Development Partnerships Program, the Canada Pension Plan Disability (CPP-D), Employment Insurance (EI) Sickness Benefits, Veterans Affairs Canada, and Canada Revenue Agency's (CRA) disability tax credits (SRDC, 2022c; Smith Fowler, Patry & Wannell, 2014). Provincial Funding includes social assistance programs (ODSP, BCEA, PWD), worker's compensation programs and, for employers, support for accessible employment standards (SRDC, 2022c; Smith Fowler, Patry & Wannell, 2014).

Private/employer support

Private or quasi-public income sources for people with disabilities can include long term disability or private insurance plans that are mostly sponsored by employers or professional associations and administered by private insurance companies (Smith Fowler, Patry, & Wannell, 2014). Examples can include motor vehicle accident benefits and criminal injuries compensation (Smith Fowler, Patry, & Wannell, 2014). Such disability or private insurance plans can supplement earnings and sometimes provide support for rehabilitation (Smith Fowler, Patry, & Wannell, 2014).

Other

Other sources include help from parents and relatives/family, friends, legal employment, or illegal activity (SRDC, 2022a; McCreary Centre Society, 2014).

5. WHAT BARRIERS STAND IN THE WAY OF YOUTH ACCESSING THE SERVICES THEY NEED, INCLUDING THOSE NEWLY ARISING IN THE CURRENT CONTEXT OF COVID-19?

Geographical barriers

Youth not residing locally to an employment program may face transportation difficulties (BC Centre for Employment Excellence, 2017b). Location was found to be a factor for youth outside

of major metro areas (BC Centre for Employment Excellence, 2017b), since many employment services are located in urban areas and provide less coverage elsewhere (SRDC, 2021d; Smith Fowler et al., 2022). Location of job opportunities is also an issue, with clients often not wanting to commute into metro regions, in particular if the job offers a low wage (BC Centre for Employment Excellence, 2017b).

Programs located outside the areas where youth typically spend time is also a barrier, as often this can hamper transportation (SRDC, 2021d). When determining program location, public transit and parking costs should be a prime consideration (SRDC, 2021d).

Financial barriers

Wages and benefits are needed as part of youth employment programs, as difficulty meeting basic needs is a barrier to participation (Bobadilla et al., 2021a; YMCA of Greater Vancouver, 2014; SRDC, 2021d). Youth who are experiencing poverty or food insecurity in particular experience financial challenges to participating in employment programming (SRDC, 2021d). Youth report not being able to afford or have access to health benefits such as counseling as a barrier to employment (YMCA of Greater Vancouver, 2014; SRDC, 2021d). Improved compatibility between employment service participation and social assistance is also required (SRDC, 2021d) so youth do not fear that participating will remove access to their benefits.

Social barriers

A key shift to increasing accessibility is the recognition that barriers lie in the systems, structures, and environments around youth rather than within youth themselves (SRDC, 2021d). Youth can be alienated from programming when its design or delivery implies they are themselves responsible for the employment barriers or challenges they face (SRDC, 2021d).

In order to ensure that youth needs are met program, design should acknowledge how youth come from diverse backgrounds and may face multiple and different barriers (Bobadilla et al., 2021a). Different social and demographic backgrounds can yield different barriers to employment, including youth who are racialized, newcomers to Canada, Indigenous, in care, experiencing homelessness or unstable housing, survivors of violence, or single parents (Bobadilla et al., 2021a). Narrow criteria can leave youth concerned that they may not meet specific criteria for a potentially useful program (SRDC, 2021d). At the same time, there is a place for programs that can be specifically tailored to youth with disabilities (YMCA of Greater Vancouver, 2014).

Structural barriers diverse youth encounter include poverty and difficulty in accessing financial assistance (Bobadilla et al., 2021a). Additionally, some youth have expressed that shyness and a

fear of speaking to strangers has prevented them from applying to jobs (SRDC, 2019b). New strategies may be needed in the 2020s as COVID-19 appears to have resulted in decreased engagement with employment services clients with disabilities (Celeste, de Raaf, & Fraser, 2022).

Barriers due to insufficient levels of support available

Limited spots available in a program or strict eligibility criteria create competition barriers (SRDC, 2021d). Some youth feel stigmatized by a competitive process that may have identity criteria for participation, or that set minimum requirements such as holding a diploma or references (SRDC, 2021d).

There are concerns among youth with disabilities regarding overall access to programs and supports (YMCA of Greater Vancouver, 2014). Insufficient resources for proper assessment are an issue for youth with specific needs (SRDC, 2018).

Barriers caused by wait times

There is a need for easily accessible and timely services for youth with disabilities (YMCA of Greater Vancouver, 2014). Wait times are often lengthy for getting an appointment or accessing resources, including assistive technology (YMCA of Greater Vancouver, 2014; SRDC, 2018). Such wait times might cause youth to accept services or resources that do not adequately meet their needs or that are not a good fit for them (SRDC, 2018). Extensive wait times to hear about funding or program acceptance represent a barrier demotivating the pursuit of program registration (SRDC, 2019b).

Barriers due to poor awareness of programs

Many youth are not aware of employment programs in their area, and actively seeking out this information has become more difficult through COVID-19 (SRDC, 2021d; Celeste, de Raaf, & Fraser, 2022). There was a lack of real time employment information throughout the pandemic specific to people with disabilities (Celeste, de Raaf, & Fraser, 2022). Generally, youth understand employment programming as a concept but have not received information about such programs (SRDC, 2021d).

Youth often expect to find information on employment opportunities and on employment/training programs in the same places when this may not always be the case (SRDC, 2021d). Youth tend to search for services based on their geographical regions, and so seeing ads on social media can be helpful for awareness and capturing their interest to explore program

options (SRDC, 2021d). When searching online, youth tend to use the key words “employment program”, “employment services”, or “employment course” in addition to their location (SRDC, 2021d). Youth would find helpful a centralized website for both employment and employment programs focused by geographical region (SRDC, 2021d).

When designing advertisements to feature employment programs, it is important to consider that youth with disabilities sometimes feel employment programs are not intended for them and could stigmatize them (SRDC, 2021d).

Barriers due to limited flexibility or follow-up

To minimize barriers, holistic supports are needed which ‘support the whole person’ and provide a pathway to employment (SRDC, 2021d). Many youth prefer flexibility in requirements for attendance and scheduling, i.e., without penalty for lateness/absence (SRDC, 2021d). Intermittent work, dynamic/periodic disabilities, or unpredictable health challenges make this level of flexibility essential, and it is important to consider that many youth are seeking to participate in programs outside of regular work/school hours (SRDC, 2021d). However, some youth have also expressed that they appreciated the structure and stability offered by programs with consistent schedules (SRDC, 2021d).

Youth would like continuation of support between program completion and acquisition of employment (YMCA of Greater Vancouver, 2014). Youth would also like to preview or observe programs before registration or to have a trial period to ensure the services are a good fit (SRDC, 2021d; SRDC, 2018).

Communication barriers

Staff must engage youth with disabilities long enough to generate a proper assessment of their needs in order to ensure services can adequately meet these needs (SRDC, 2018). Staff need to understand youth needs well enough to make good recommendations (SRDC, 2018). Youth find being able to talk and connect with other youth in the program helpful to forge relationships and communication skills. Some youth have suggested icebreakers, group activities, and the creation of Facebook or WhatsApp groups to assist with this (SRDC, 2018; SRDC, 2021d).

Difficulty navigating services

Youth with disabilities have identified concerns with navigating the employment services system (YMCA of Greater Vancouver, 2014). This includes navigating the broader services provider system and network (YMCA of Greater Vancouver, 2014).

Finding employment program information online is often difficult (SRDC, 2021d). Arduous registration processes are often a barrier and require too much commitment at the outset (SRDC, 2021d). This can include registration processes requiring too much detailed personal information, or a mandatory in-person meeting or phone call at the outset (SRDC, 2021d). Additionally, some youth are concerned about how their registration information will be used (SRDC, 2021d).

6. HOW DO YOUTH WITH DISABILITIES WANT TO BE REACHED?

'One-stop-shops'

Youth would prefer multiple services in one location. Depending on skills and services, such 'one stop shops' could be physical and virtual. Given the diversity of needs among youth with disabilities, it is important to provide access to multiple services youth may need in one location and provide access to a broad range of supports (Smith Fowler et al., 2022; BC Centre for Employment Excellence, 2017a). These could include mental health and substance abuse services, social services, justice services, and services for housing, education, and employment (BC Centre for Employment Excellence, 2017a). The full range of services does not need to be available at all times, but all services should be readily accessible (BC Centre for Employment Excellence, 2017a).

Minimizing the fragmentation of services is key to limiting delays in accessing them, as well as making it easier for youth to find the services (Smith Fowler et al., 2022). Additionally, those designing the service should make sure services are offered in locations where youth typically spend time (SRDC, 2021d).

Holistic and integrated services

Youth seek services that are holistic and integrated, making it important to focus on designing and implementing services that are both youth and family friendly as well as culturally appropriate (BC Centre for Employment Excellence, 2017a). Program facilitators have to build a trusting relationship with participants in order to encourage them to become employment ready (SRDC, 2019a).

Services should be flexible to ensure they meet the individual's needs, including appropriate time to practice newly acquired skills or approaches (SRDC, 2019a; McCreary Centre Society, 2014). A one-size-fits-all approach does not meet youth needs, and a key aspect of flexibility is thus tailoring approaches to what works best, e.g., meeting on site or at home, sending reminders to attend appointments, extending support and preparation as needed for appointments, and so on

(SRDC, 2019a). It can also be beneficial to combine different approaches rather than narrowing in on a single mode of delivery (Lalonde, 2020).

Furthermore, for youth who do not have the support of family and friends, employment support programs alone may not be enough (BC Centre for Employment Excellence, 2014). In these situations, youth need to be connected to youth workers and other supportive adults to assist them in overcoming employment barriers (BC Centre for Employment Excellence, 2014).

Easily accessible and well-marketed information

Programs will not reach youth unless they make information easy to find and market services appropriately. Carefully targeted advertising would include considerations such as appearing in search results from Google and on specific social media platforms (e.g., Instagram, Twitter, Facebook, and TikTok), as well as online spaces frequented by job seekers (SRDC, 2021d). Advertising should communicate a safe, welcoming, non-judgemental and inclusive environment (SRDC, 2021d). Establishing credibility is also important. Although youth find referrals to services from family and friends to be most credible, a well-designed website and a consistent social media presence can improve credibility online (SRDC, 2021d).

In line with the "one stop shop" approach, information and outreach accessed from a distance or in person should be as centralized as possible (SRDC, 2021d). Sources need to offer clear and concise information about each program and easily identifiable contact information for inquiries (SRDC, 2021d). This could be done through options for website chat boxes, one-to-one meetings, or program information sessions (SRDC, 2021d). Allowing youth to compare and contrast programs in order to select the most suitable option would also help (SRDC, 2021d).

Youth will be deterred by language that is patronizing or disingenuous, is stigmatizing or lacking inclusivity (SRDC, 2021d). The focus of messaging will be on how the program will fit the youth's needs, rather than the other way around (SRDC, 2021d). This calls for clarity about the tangible aspects of employment programming and the specific services offered (SRDC, 2021d).

7. WHAT SERVICES OR PROGRAMS DO YOUTH WITH DISABILITIES WANT TO BE CONNECTED TO?

Programs and services must be engaging

Youth will seek out and connect with programs that engage them. To operationalize youth engagement, programs should seek to maintain a safe and motivational environment where youth feel comfortable and confident (Bobadilla et al., 2021a; SRDC, 2021d) and that allow youth

opportunities to interact with one another, practice, and ask questions (Bobadilla et al., 2021a). Involving youth with disabilities in the co-design of services and supports that are aimed at helping them is an obvious way to achieve this (SRDC, 2021b).

To ensure youth feel safer about sharing their own experiences, facilitators should work to build relationships with youth, including sharing experiences of challenges and failures (Bobadilla et al., 2021a). One-on-one coaching and mentoring are important to some youth (McCreary Centre Society, 2014; Bobadilla et al., 2021a). Employment goals should be flexible and individualized based on the youth's career goals (McCreary Centre Society, 2014).

SRDC fieldwork found mixed responses in regard to whether youth preferred to be grouped for training. Youth tend to resist programming that is grouped by educational status or skill level as they do not want to be 'boxed in' by assumptions (SRDC, 2021d). However, some suggested that grouping youth by career interest could be beneficial for tailored workshops, guest speakers, and networking opportunities (SRDC, 2021d).

Program facilitators should actively check-in and follow up with youth, even after program completion (Bobadilla et al., 2021a). Being proactive and checking up on participants' mental health and well-being is important (Bobadilla et al., 2021a). During such communications, facilitators should emphasize that staff can continue to connect youth with available supports and resources (Bobadilla et al., 2021a).

A final means to foster engagement is to celebrate milestones as measures of progress (Bobadilla et al., 2021a). This can include celebrating small wins, including completions of any significant task, event, occurrence or decisions made in progress of meeting longer-term goals (Bobadilla et al., 2021a). This is helpful both to measure progress and highlight continued success (Bobadilla et al., 2021a).

Facilitators should be familiar with youth

Ensure facilitators are familiar with youth experiences, including in the labour market. Youth want to hear from facilitators who are 'like' them in many ways, through lived experience; however it is important to acknowledge that this means different things to different people (SRDC, 2021d). For example, youth have said that they may prefer facilitators who are youth themselves, Black, Indigenous or people of colour (BIPOC), have lived experience in care, or have lived experience with disabilities (SRDC, 2021d). Marginalized youth are more likely to trust programming designed, built and approved by people who have shared similar experiences with them (SRDC, 2021d).

Employment service providers should also work with local employers to maintain relationships and understand industry needs (Bobadilla et al., 2021a). It is important that employers who hire youth undergo training to understand the challenges they face (McCreary Centre Society, 2014).

Diversity and flexibility

Diverse youth need flexible employment goals. Programs should be flexible and tailored to the individual's career goals (McCreary Centre Society, 2014). Youth suggested that the focus should also be on achieving their long-term, fulfilling career paths (and intermediate steps along that path) rather than meeting program targets focused on immediate employment or addressing current labour market needs (SRDC, 2021d). By implication, the purpose of programming would move beyond getting employment to maintaining it, with youth able to re-enter programs as needed (SRDC, 2021d). Although basic skills like creating resumes and cover letters are important, options should not be limited to these skills as youth are interested in services that go beyond 'cookie cutter' approaches (SRDC, 2021d).

A longer-term or extendable program model might better address the different needs that occur at different points in employment where youth may want to ask questions, clarify reasonable expectations and accommodations, identify other supports, extend their learning, gain new skills, continue to network, and build career plans (SRDC, 2021d).

For example, additional supports are helpful for youth pursuing work where renewed certifications or equipment/tools may be required (e.g., construction or food service industries) (SRDC, 2021d). Diverse youth will be sensitive to tokenism and expectations that they should feel grateful for any opportunity (SRDC, 2021d). Additionally, employment programs should acknowledge the realities of racism, ableism, and discrimination in the labour market (SRDC, 2021d).

Among supports mentioned as helpful were:

- Basic skills like resume/cover letter support and interview skills (both virtual and in-person), as well as accessing job postings and completing applications (McCreary Centre Society, 2014; BC Centre for Employment Excellence, 2014).
- Soft skills such as interpersonal skills, workplace relationships, networking, conflict management, and in-person/online etiquette for job searching (Bobadilla et al., 2021a; McCreary Centre Society, 2014; Bobadilla et al., 2021a).
- Addressing the realities of racism, ableism, and discrimination in the labour market (SRDC, 2021d).

- Support for additional or renewed certifications in a field, such as CPR/First Aid or Food Safety (SRDC, 2021d).
- Tangible supports like computer access, PPE, or specialized supplies (SRDC, 2021d).

Tailored and individualized programming

Programming is appealing when tailored to each youth's individual needs. Service providers who engage with and listen to youth will be better able to make individualized recommendations (Bobadilla et al., 2021a) and tailor programming based on youth strengths, skills, and interests (SRDC, 2021d). One-on-one coaching can be one way to acknowledge and validate an individual's strengths and existing skillsets, supporting youth to become more comfortable and confident in communicating their needs and interests (Bobadilla et al., 2021a).

Individualized programming will take into account long term career paths and opportunities that youth want to pursue (SRDC, 2021d). Youth appeared resistant to programs that focused too much on simply obtaining employment, as they felt such programs tended to push certain types of work (e.g., manual labour and service jobs) that they may not necessarily be interested in (SRDC, 2021d).

RESEARCH GAPS AND CONCLUSIONS

When the lessons learned from the preceding sections were shared with SRDC researchers connected to these projects in an internal workshop, one of the first research gaps identified was how best to define youth with disabilities, and therefore identify their needs. Having a clear definition of disability is critical to understanding the research questions. While the project adopted the quite broad definition in the Accessible Canada Act, embracing social and attitudinal barriers, it has to be acknowledged that many youth who could meet this definition would not self identify or define themselves as having a disability. This hampers the process of gathering evidence about their needs and designing programs to meet them. This gap remains to be filled.

The definition of disability used also alters the locus of responsibility for barriers to employment, for example whether society or the individual has to change. Thus, before beginning research on barriers to employment and on optimal employment services, the implications of the definition of disability adopted need to be assessed. Findings need to apply across the diversity of disabilities (e.g., episodic vs. stable, mental health, learning disabilities, short term vs. long term, neurodivergence, etc.) and embrace how each can differently impact youths' relationship to the labour market and with employment services. Research gaps remain because findings do not apply to all these diverse experiences.

There is a considerable gap in knowledge about what culturally responsive, identity-affirming and trauma-informed service delivery actually looks like and how it works to make a difference in the labour market. Many research participants spoke to the benefits of such practices, but questions remain for those who seek to operationalize these recommendations: From the perspectives of youth with disabilities, what do positive labour market experiences look like and how might we measure this? What do well-delivered services look like? How do they work to support youth success? In what ways should this success in the delivery of employment programs be measured in order to be relevant? What does an optimal approach look like for a program to measure its success and outcomes over time when it is youths' longitudinal experience that most matters?

Having specialized services is important, given the specificity of some youth needs, but such services should be readily accessible. There are different points of entry into the labour market, so centralization of such services online and where youth are located presents an obvious solution to offer support for these multiple access points. Another key dimension is the holistic approach to services, which means having the capacity to serve the whole person and all their needs instead of just focusing on a single characteristic, assessment, or medical diagnosis. Functional needs can differ greatly from person to person, requiring individualized, functionally different services tailored to youth with disabilities specifically (as distinct from cookie-cutter

and adult-focused services). And again, research points to the importance of integration with services that go beyond employment. Youth may start out by only looking for employment services, then gradually other issues may present themselves which require additional support. There is a research gap around operationalizing these multiple dimensions of service improvement. How best can youth be connected to a centralized, holistic, integrated set of services, in ways that service packages can be tailored to their needs, given the concentrations of services required and the diverse geography of Canada?

There tends to be lots of employer interest in hiring people with disabilities but also a lack of understanding on how best to do so, and on what the benefits to the organization are. There is thus a research gap around the optimal formats and content for employer training on empathetic and adaptive approaches that can engage and motivate youth with disabilities. Where should the relationship between employers and youth begin and end? What is the extent of employer's role in training and skills development? More research is needed into successful models of employer-youth engagement that work for both large and small employers.

The incompatibility between pursuing employment and receiving financial and related supports (health benefits for example) is also an area for development. Many youth express concerns that starting employment will remove their disability benefits, creating a disincentive to pursuing employment. They worry they will later find themselves unable to work for a time and have difficulty recovering their position on income assistance. Seemingly, new policy innovation is needed: research projects could test new models for providing financial support and information about the consequences of employment and training transitions.

It is also important to break down the forms that stigma and discrimination in the workplace – and in society as it relates to being employed (access to information online, training, education, and transportation) – can take and the real consequences it can have. To improve services, we need a better understanding of how stigma and discrimination play out in different situations: when youth with disabilities apply for a job; during the hiring process; and when they begin a new job?

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APPENDIX A: PROJECT DESCRIPTIONS

Table 2 Descriptions of frequently cited SRDC projects (cited five times or more)

Project Title	In-text citation	Purpose	Population	Data sources	Scale of data collection	Type of analysis
A Conceptual Framework for a Trauma and Violence Informed Approach to Youth Employment and Skills Training	SRDC, 2020a	▪ Examining how young people's experience of trauma and violence – individually, communally, and historically – can intersect with barriers to programs, services, and supports aimed at facilitating their entry into the labour market ▪ Examining ways in which these interventions can draw on and embed trauma- and violence-informed practices to minimize barriers to engagement and retention in employment supports for youth with experiences of trauma	Youth, particularly racialized youth	▪ Peer-reviewed and grey literature ▪ Employment programs (environmental scan) ▪ Key informant interviews with Canadian academic experts in trauma and violence, youth development, and youth mental health	▪ Fewer than 20 peer-reviewed articles ▪ Three interviews	Qualitative

Project Title	In-text citation	Purpose	Population	Data sources	Scale of data collection	Type of analysis
A Trauma and Violence Informed Approach to Youth Employment and Skills Training: Service Delivery Model	Bobadilla, Pakula, & Smith Fowler, 2021	▪ Represents SRDC's learning about trauma- and violence-informed (TVI) approaches to training and employment services for youth ▪ It also includes a proposed service delivery model	Youth who have experienced trauma and violence	▪ Background research ▪ Interviews with experts, including providers of youth employment and training services	▪ Interviews with several researchers and community leaders ▪ Interviews with over a dozen employment support services providers	Qualitative
Assistive Equipment and Technology for Students with Disabilities: Final Report	SRDC, 2018	A study of assistive equipment and technology for postsecondary students with disabilities meant to: ▪ Inform assistive technology (AT)-related decision making ▪ Provide guidance around the selection of appropriate AT to address education barriers ▪ Assist in forming policy and practice for the delivery of funding	Postsecondary students with disabilities	▪ Literature and information source review from postsecondary institution disability service providers and government support programs related to postsecondary assistive technology ▪ Interviews with postsecondary staff and students with disabilities	▪ 99 postsecondary institutions ▪ 15 government support programs ▪ 22 interviews with postsecondary staff ▪ 21 interviews with postsecondary students with disabilities	Qualitative

Project Title	In-text citation	Purpose	Population	Data sources	Scale of data collection	Type of analysis
Barriers to employment and training for equity-seeking groups: Final Report	Pakula & Smith Fowler, 2021	▪ To provide a synthesis of research on the skills gaps, learning needs, and systemic barriers experienced by different populations under-represented in the Canadian labour market ▪ To inform strategy in improving capacity to measure, monitor, and address barriers faced by these groups	Equity seeking groups underrepresented in Canada's labour market (women, youth, Indigenous persons, newcomers, racialized groups, people who identify as LGBTQ2S+, and persons with disabilities)	▪ Document review ▪ Targeted literature review ▪ Internal staff discussions	▪ 20 SRDC projects related to equity seeking groups ▪ Targeted academic and grey literature review ▪ Six key informant interviews with SRDC staff ▪ Two-hour focus group with SRDC staff	Qualitative
Disability and the workplace: Challenges, trends, and best practices among SMEs in Canada – Focus Group Technical Report	Paragg, Brooks-Cleator, & Wray, 2022	▪ To assess challenges, trends, and best practices among small and medium sized employers in Canada with respect to disability and the workplace	Small and medium sized employers (less than 500 employees) People with disabilities	▪ Focus groups with small and medium sized employers ▪ Literature review ▪ Primary data collection (surveys)	▪ Eight focus groups with 30 participants ▪ Survey of small and medium sized employers ▪ Survey of people with lived experiences of disability	Qualitative and quantitative

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Employment Navigator Pilot Project Final Report: Pathways to Employment	SRDC, 2019a	▪ To explore how to best support long-term unemployed individuals with multiple barriers to move into/close to employment ▪ Pilot delivering employment supports to tenants in supportive housing	Tenants in supportive housing	▪ Place-based outreach approach to engage participants to join project ▪ Participant assessment process	▪ Three-year pilot project ▪ 91 tenants participated	Qualitative and quantitative
Equity in Education: Final Evaluation Report	SRDC, 2019b	▪ To improve educational outcomes for youth with vulnerabilities living in low-income neighbourhoods by providing coordinated, wrap-around supports	Youth (aged 14-18) with vulnerabilities living in low-income neighbourhoods	▪ Baseline and follow up surveys for participating youth ▪ Document review ▪ Interviews and focus groups with students and their parents, SPSWs, and delivery partners	▪ Youth (aged 14-18) in three communities ▪ 63 youth pre survey participants and 39 post survey participants ▪ 17 youth focus groups and interviews ▪ Five SPSW interviews ▪ Four delivery partner interviews	Qualitative and quantitative

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Field trials and evaluation of WISE programming in North Simcoe County	Celeste, de Raaf, & Poitevin-DesRivières, 2022	▪ Examine outcomes of initiative supporting the longer-term employment and well-being of at-risk youth	At-risk youth in North Simcoe County	▪ Pre and post intervention surveys with participants ▪ Field observations of training and work placements ▪ In-depth interviews with program leadership and community stakeholders ▪ Academic and grey literature review	▪ Four-year study ▪ 59 at-risk youth recruited for study	Qualitative and quantitative
Increasing employment through inclusive workplaces – Interim report	Celeste, de Raaf, & Fraser, 2022	▪ Pilot project testing employer-focused recruitment model to support employers seeking to diversify their workplace	Small and medium sized employers People with disabilities	▪ Employer assessment and engagement ▪ Job matching ▪ Evaluation of outcomes	▪ Anticipated three-year study ▪ Target of facilitating 175 work placements	Qualitative and quantitative
Literature Review/Environmental Scan – Episodic and Moderate Disabilities	Smith Fowler, Patry, & Wannell, 2014	▪ To identify employment barriers and challenges faced by people with episodic or moderate disabilities	People with episodic or moderate disabilities	▪ Literature review and environmental scan of academic and grey literature	▪ Articles published after 1999 in 28 databases in six subject areas ▪ 39 articles that met all search criteria	Qualitative

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Negotiating the Barriers to Employment for Vulnerable Youth in British Columbia.	McCreary Centre Society, 2014	▪ To engage vulnerable young people to identify the barriers they face in finding and keeping employment	Vulnerable young people in urban and rural areas	▪ Focus groups and surveys	▪ 150 youth participants in total ▪ 127 took part in a focus group, and 128 completed a survey	Qualitative and quantitative
Newfoundland and Labrador Workforce Innovation Centre: Pathways to Work	SRDC, 2019b	▪ To examine challenges to Inuit youth employment in Labrador, including lack of awareness about effective employment practices and a lack of alignment between youth skills and available opportunities	Inuit youth in Labrador	▪ Knowledge synthesis and best practices inventory ▪ Targeted academic and grey literature review ▪ Conversations with stakeholders ▪ Co-design of program models with youth, employers, and community stakeholders	▪ Conversations with 11 stakeholders to contextualize literature review findings ▪ 9 employer participants ▪ 6 community stakeholder participants ▪ 12 youth participants	Qualitative
Soft skills as a workforce development strategy for Opportunity youth: Review of the evidence – Scoping Report	Basharat et al., 2021	▪ To define and contextualize employment-specific soft skills and synthesize promising approaches by employers and employment support programs	Opportunity youth	▪ Literature review and environmental scan	▪ Peer-reviewed and grey literature from nine databases	Qualitative

Project Title	In-text citation	Purpose	Population	Data sources	Scale of data collection	Type of analysis
Soft skills as a workforce development strategy for Opportunity youth: A proposed service delivery model	Bobadilla et al., 2021a	▪ To provide an evidence-based practice guide to working with youth to develop soft skills through employment and training	Opportunity youth	▪ Focus group discussion with youth ▪ Interviews with service providers and agency staff	▪ One focus group with 6 youth ▪ 14 interviews with representatives from employment and training organizations	Qualitative
Study of demand-led strategies: Engaging employers to improve employment outcomes for BC Youth	Zizys, 2014	▪ To profile the broad labour market indicators for youth ▪ To review demand-side strategies and their application ▪ To profile encouraging employer practices	Youth in BC	▪ Labour market data analysis ▪ Literature review	▪ Labour market data for youth in BC	Qualitative and quantitative
The role of career education on students' education choices and post-secondary outcomes: Theoretical and evidence base preparation	SRDC, 2020c	▪ To examine how early career education interventions affect high school students career decision making	High school students	▪ Literature review	▪ Literature review of career information, career theories, career decision making, and career education	Qualitative

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Trauma-and-Violence-Informed approaches to employment and skills training with youth	SRDC, 2021c	▪ To provide a set of principles, strategies, and guidelines for programs and in developing and implementing their trauma and violence informed services	Youth who have experienced trauma and violence	▪ Literature review	▪ Literature review of trauma and violence informed approaches to employment and skills training	Qualitative
Understanding barriers to employment and employment program participation for lower mainland youth living with mental illness	YMCA of Greater Vancouver, 2014	▪ To explore the experiences of unemployment and work by youth living with mental illness ▪ To explore the experiences and perspectives of some who employ these youth as well as the service providers who work with these youth and their employers	Youth living with mental illness	▪ Interviews and focus groups with youth, employers, and services providers	▪ Informants included 11 youth, 7 service provider representatives and 10 employers	Qualitative
Understanding current employment programming and services for BC Youth – Project summary report	BC Centre for Employment Excellence, 2014	▪ To overview five research reports offering insights into barriers faced by youth in the labour market	Youth	▪ Review and summary of five SRDC projects	▪ Five SRDC projects	Qualitative

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Youth Employment Social Enterprises – Project Design and Development	BC Centre for Employment Excellence, 2017a	▪ To document the history, design, and development of the Youth Employment Social Enterprises (YESE) project ▪ To overview early lessons from initial employment social enterprises and partners ▪ To provide insights into role of employment social enterprises in supporting workforce development	Opportunity youth	▪ Baseline survey for youth ▪ Post placement survey for youth ▪ One year follow up survey for youth	▪ Three-year pilot project ▪ 15 youth recruited to participate	Qualitative
Youth Employment Social Enterprises (YESE) project Final Report	BC Centre for Employment Excellence, 2017b	▪ To provide the background, design, and preliminary findings of the Youth Employment Social Enterprises (YESE) project	Opportunity youth	▪ Baseline survey for youth ▪ Post placement survey for youth ▪ One year follow up survey for youth	▪ Three-year pilot project ▪ 15 youth recruited to participate	Qualitative
Youth Program Navigator Pilot – Final ethnographic field study report	SRDC, 2021d	▪ To explore how best to improve certain sub-populations of youth's access to employment supports	Youth not in employment, education, or training	▪ Literature review ▪ Online discussion board ▪ Semi-structured individual interviews	▪ 66 youth participants, 19 with disabilities	Qualitative

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www.srdc.org • 1 866 896 7732 • info@srdc.org

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